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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000028

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: FURTHER PRE-ELECTION FRAGMENTATION IN THE  
OPPOSITION

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 449

[1](#)B. 03 LILONGWE 938

[1](#)1. (SBU) Malawi Congress Party (MCP) vice president Gwanda Chakuamba resigned from the leading opposition party and formed the Republican Party on January 8. After a shaky seven-month marriage of convenience with MCP president and personal nemesis John Tembo (ref B), Chakuamba announced his departure was a result of "public demands" that he form a party of his own. Tembo, apparently surprised by Chakuamba's decision, has not yet publicly commented.

[1](#)2. (U) Chakuamba's defection came 10 days after former MCP treasurer Hetherwick Ntaba left the MCP to form his own party, New Congress for Democracy (NCD). Ntaba, who is interim president of the party, told a press conference on December 28 that he formed the party because of political difficulties he was facing with the MCP's leadership. (NOTE: The once faithful confidant of Tembo, Ntaba has had difficulties in the MCP since he attempted to run for the party's presidency at the April 2003 convention per ref A. Recently Ntaba, who has been accused of collusion with the ruling United Democratic Front and President Muluzi, was suspended from the MCP's National Executive Committee.)

COMMENT

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[1](#)3. (SBU) Ntaba is popular among a very small group of urban technocrats in the MCP, most of whom are unlikely to leave the patronage system and prestige of an established party. His departure will have little real effect on the MCP, and his only chances for continued political influence are through a coalition with other opposition parties or, if rumors be true, through further collusion with the UDF and Muluzi. Chakuamba, on the other hand, has controlled a faction of roughly half of the MCP membership. His departure, while not surprising, will mean major electoral and party recalculations for the MCP. Without Chakuamba's support (and that of his followers), the MCP is no longer the leading opposition party; it is simply an opposition party among many others.

[1](#)4. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED. With the elections four months away, the next couple of weeks will be decisive in forming the opposition ballot. It remains plausible that a Kenya-like situation occurs where the majority of the opposition parties coalesce to field a single presidential candidate and to share parliamentary seats -- which opposition parties contend will happen. With a February 25 deadline on nomination of presidential candidates, serious negotiation (along with serious compromises) will have to occur rather quickly among the various opposition party leaders. However, considering the opposition's previous failures to work together, a Zambia-like scenario is also possible with divisions among numerous opposition parties allowing the ruling UDF to maintain power with a fairly low percentage of votes. END COMMENT.

BROWNING